GERMANY/HONG KONG JOINT RESEARCH SCHEME
THE PROJECT REPORT
(for Project Completion)

Project Number: 9_HK020/12

Title

Complexity in Visual Communication: A Diachronic Case Study of the Comic Book as Multimodal Document

Particulars

	Hong Kong team			German team
Name of Project Co-ordinator (with title)	Dr. Francisco O. D. Veloso			Prof. John Bateman
Name of Co-Investigator (if any)	Carman NG (PhD student) Nancy GUO (PhD student)			Dr. Chiao-I TSENG Dr. Janina M. A. WILDFEUER
Institution or Institutional affiliation	☐ CityU ☐ CUHK ☐ HKBU ☐ HKIEd	☐ HKU ☐ HKUST ☐ LU ✓ PolyU		☐ University of Bremen ☐ Others: _____
Other project team members (if any)	Mr. CHEUNG, Hiu Laam Felix			

Funding Period

	1st year	2nd year (if applicable)
Start Date	1 January 2013	1 January 2014
Completion Date	31 December 2013	31 December 2014

Objective(s) as per original application

1. To characterize the different demands on visual literacy being made in contemporary society;
2. To describe comic books as multimodal documents in order to investigate the semiotic resources deployed in the process of construing meanings;
3. To compare the data diachronically, in order to track changes in terms of meaning-making resources deployed in their construction
4. To develop a metadata framework for multimodal visual corpus organization;
5. To develop a framework for the integrated verbal-visual analysis of comics;
6. To build an annotated corpus of comic books for research and educational purposes.
7. To characterize gender construction in the corpus and its relation to readership.

Details of Report [Please attach relevant document(s)]

i) Outline of proposed research and results obtained

The aim of this proposal was to develop a systematic methodology for the annotation and analysis of comics as complex multimodal documents. The motivation for this study is that comics have been mostly studied from cultural, historical and aesthetic perspectives (Klock, 2002). As a result, the focus of attention has been more on the content plane, leaving the expression plane underdeveloped. This proposal therefore builds the work of Thierry Groensteen (2007) and treats the page as a macro unity of analysis in the process of semiosis. Applying a systemic-functional approach, the team has developed a system network that allows the annotation for the analysis of page layout of comics in order to identify changes across time. The team has tested several software available for the annotation of multimodal texts and has used UAM Multimodal Corpus tool to annotate and analyse a total of 200 sample pages of comics from different cultural traditions, testing the consistently and viability of its use for the annotation for a range of pictorial narratives. The second step was to analyse sample pages to verify diachronic changes, using a corpus of 90 super-hero comics pages, selecting the first three pages of stories published by DC and Marvel comics with *Batman*, *Superman* and *Captain America* in reprint collections, between 1939 and 1969. A corpus has also been analysed regarding language in two ways. First, the language used on a set of comics published between the late 1930s and 1960s was transcribed and annotated, allowing the generation of graphs that help with visualization to verify changes in use of language in comics across time. The patterns on the use of language have been analysed and discussed and a first version of a system network has been developed, allowing for the analysis of language functions and relation to visual resources.

ii) Significance of research results

The results obtained this far have confirmed the viability of the annotation system developed, as we are able to verify changes in detail, and determine when those changes occur, such as the use or dropping of certain tiling techniques and when they occur. Most importantly, the research results this far demonstrate the viability of a systematic approach to comics, contrary to current notions in comics studies that they do not have "a system in the pictorial representation" (Postema, 2013, p. XVI). The results obtained so far demonstrate changes in the use of language and its relation to pictorial elements in two ways. First, the use of language in captions has been reduced in terms of quantity, when comparing data available between 1930-1960s with data available from 2000s. Captions are used less frequently, but also their function has changed, pointing out to the expansion of the potential of semiotic resources available. Secondly, the use of language used to be more congruent with pictures regarding meanings, that is, language and pictures would overlap in their meanings, with language generally being used to, departing from pictures, add more meanings. However, when compared to contemporary samples analysed, language and pictures are less congruent, that is, they are used to add different pieces of information to the narrative, again expanding the narrative potential.

References

Postema, Barbara. (2013). *Narrative structure in comics*. Rochester, New York: RIT Press.
Groensteen, T. (2007 [1999])., *The system of comics*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Miss. translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, from the original French *Syste`me de la bande desine´e* (1999).
Klock, G. (2002). How to read superhero comics and why. New York: Continuum.

iii) Research output

Publications

Bateman, John, Veloso, Francisco, Wildfeuer, Janina, Cheung Felix and Guo, Nancy. (forthcoming). An open multilevel annotation scheme for the visual layout of comics and graphic novels: motivations and design. Submitted to the Journal of Digital Scholarship in the Humanities. Under review.

Bateman, John & Veloso, Francisco O. D. (2013). The semiotic resources of comics in movie adaptation: Ang Lee's Hulk (2003) as a case study. *Studies in Comics, Volume 4, Number 1,. pp 135-157. Doi:10.1386/stic.4.1.135-1.*

Conferences

Veloso, Francisco & Wildfeuer, Janina. *Towards the systematic analysis of comicbooks: Annotations and interpretations.* Departmental Seminar Series, Department of English, PolyU, 13 September 2014.

Veloso, Francisco. "A foreword on the use of verbal language in comics". *Multisemiotic Talks MUST5*, PolyU, Shenzhen, China, 21-22 July 2013.

Veloso, Francisco & Bateman, John. *The multimodal construction of acceptability: Marvel's Civil War comic books and the PATRIOT Act.* Workshop on Comics, Bremen University, Germany, 24 April 2013.

iv) Potential for or impact on further research collaboration

This travel grant has contributed to the consolidation of research collaboration between the two research groups. The group has been actively working on joint publications and submission of research grants. GRF B-Q45E Text-image Relations: An Empirical Investigation of the Semiotic Labour of Comicbooks. We have currently drafted and submitted a full paper (around 10000 words) to the Journal Digital Scholarship in the Humanities (Oxford University Press), and in the processing of writing a second paper for joint publication with the German team.